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An update on the 'Individual Creators' project

Posted on **June 17, 2015** by **Smita Kheria**

Since the end of last year, the fieldwork for the 'Individual Creators' project has taken a life of its own. Unsurprisingly, organising visits, arranging and conducting interviews, making notes and writing up observations, have been the mainstay of the past year, but it has been extremely rewarding.

I have conducted over 80 semi-structured interviews with a range of writers, illustrators, composers, artists and performers. Some of the questions that have been central to the interviews are: what role (if any) does copyright play in individual practices? How do artists/writers/musicians etc. perspectives vary (if at all)? How has the dominance of the digital domain influenced the way they work and how has it affected (if at all) their view of copyright? How have they responded to the various challenges presented by the digital economy and what role (if any) does copyright play in the way they disseminate their work? Do they see copyright as something that is valuable, and as something that works for them? Is it lacking or perhaps failing to work for them in a way that would suit their needs? Or, is it even relevant to the continuance of their creative practice and the livelihood it affords them?

The interview phase of this project commenced last summer and **the Edinburgh Festivals** provided an excellent opportunity to speak to creative practitioners who were participating in them. For instance, I was able to interview a range of authors during the Edinburgh International Book festival (to name a few*: **Christopher Brookmyre**, **Alistair Moffat**, **Denise Mina**, **John Keay**, **Pat Mills**, **Linda Strachan**, **Cat Clarke**). I followed that up with interviews at some new media festivals (Ars Electronica, ISEA, Transmediale, FutureEverything) and spoke to a range of artists (**Davide Quayola**, **Paolo Cirio**, **Matthew Plummer-Fernandez**, **Jacob Tonski**, **James Coupe**, **Golan Levin**, **Matthias Fritsch**, **Ellie Harrison**, **Joseph DeLappe**, **Jer Thorp**). The festival visits snowballed into more opportunities and interviews; such as visiting **FACT** in Liverpool (thanks to **Mike Stubbs**) for the opening of their exhibition **Group Therapy**, in March this year, where I interviewed a number of artists whose works were being exhibited (Hans Bernhard from **Ubermorgen**, **Katriona Beales**, **Melanie Manchot** and **Erica Scourti**). Many interviewees (**Robert Powell**, **Rachel McCrum**, **Sara Woolley**, **Bonnie Ebner** and others) have also generously drawn on their personal networks and ties to introduce me to other artists and organisations. Some have been, very helpfully, drawing my attention to social media discussions amongst creative practitioners on copying and copyright. Apart from the interviews, I've also been conducting ethnographic research at some of these festivals, events, and other spaces that I've visited. I've also had very useful informal conversations with agents, gallery owners, curators, and representatives of arts organisations.

In particular, one fieldwork opportunity that proved invaluable to my research was being accepted as a visiting scholar at an [Atlantic Center for the Arts \(ACA\)](#) Master-Artist-in-Residence [program](#) (thanks to [Jim Frost](#), [Nancy Lowden Norman](#), and [Nick Conroy](#)). While at ACA, I interviewed the three 'master artists' in residence ([Aram Bartholl](#), [Josh Neufeld](#), and [Jonty Harrison](#)) as well as a number of the associate artists they had selected for the residency session. In addition to the interview opportunities, the visit allowed for wide ranging informal conversations about a number of issues: the prevalent norms associated with copying and attribution across different creative sectors, the meaning and value of rights for creators and how it changes over the course of a professional career, the role of branding, and the pressures and challenges faced by early career artists.

Over the next 4-5 months, I will be conducting further interviews with a slightly expanded set of creative practitioners and will test and build upon some of the early findings that have emerged. There are also plans to conduct a separate study, at the beginning of next year, involving content analysis of online media and news, but more on that will follow in a separate post. Eventually, this blog (or a future, advanced version of it) will document the final findings of the project but I will also be sharing excerpts from a selection of interviews in the upcoming months.

*I've mentioned here the names of only a few of those interviewees who were happy to be identified. All interviewees, whether willing to be identified or choosing to remain anonymous, will be thanked suitably in full reports of the project.

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